

Exodus 33 - Thursday, June 18th, 2009

- We sort of round a corner in chapter 33 now as God tells Moses to take the Israelites and leave Mt. Sinai for the Promised-Land.
- In this chapter, we're going to see the Israelites repentance, God's grace and mercy, and Moses leadership in worship and prayer.
- This is a great study in that it can give us a great hope as it relates to our relationship to the Lord, and in turn, His relationship to us.

33:1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Depart and go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your descendants I will give it.'² And I will send My Angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.³ Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people."

- What the Lord says to Moses is quite astonishing. He tells him, in effect; "Moses, you'll still have my promise, but not my presence."
- In other words, God will still keep his promise to them and be a protection for them, but He will have to remove His presence from them.
- The reason He gives Moses for removing His presence is that, were they to be present with Him, they would be consumed by Him.

- At first glance, it may seem as if God needs to keep His distance, lest He loses His temper, and destroys them for being stiff-necked.
- However, upon further examination, what we see here isn't so much the wrath of God, as it is the amazing grace and mercy of God.

- This is God's way of saying; "It's not that I am going to kill you if you are in my presence, it's that you being in My presence will kill you."
- This isn't a play on words and we will see this verse 20 where God says; "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live."
- For God to say that He will have to withdraw His presence is really saying that He wants to protect His people from His fiery wrath.

"This refusal is protective. If YHWH is too close to Israel when they sin, His wrath will blaze out and they will die."

R. Alan Cole "Exodus Commentary" p. 222

- If you were with us last week, we talked about how it would be possible to have a relationship with God absent the presence of God.
- So that brings us to our question; "how do we as finite and sinful people, experience the presence of an infinite and sinless God?"
- The only way to, is through, the One Who is sent before us, and Who is also sent for us. This was shown to us in chapter 32:34a.

Exodus 32:34a Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, **My Angel** shall go before you. NKJV

- In other words, the only way for anyone to experience the presence of God and have a relationship with God is through this mediator.

1 Timothy 2:5-6 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all men-the testimony given in its proper time. NIV

4 And when the people heard this bad news, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments.⁵ For the LORD had said to Moses, "Say to the children of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people. I could come up into your midst in one moment and consume you. Now therefore, take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do to you.'"⁶ So the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by Mount Horeb.

- There is a very interesting and striking contrast in how the Israelites respond now, to how they react before. Here's what I'm thinking:
- They took off gold jewelry to make a false god when rebelling. Now they won't put it on before the one and true God when repenting.
- This is an outward sign of mourning the inward carnality of their flesh, by not adorning the flesh with anything that would glorify it.

"As an outward sign of mourning the lost presence of God, Israel strips off her ornaments. ...no doubt another reason for discarding the ornaments was that they had been an occasion for sin."

R. Alan Cole "Exodus Commentary" p. 222

"This is always a preliminary to mercy. Pride must strip, self-righteousness must throw off her mantle, and carnal security pull off its tinkling jewellery."

Charles Spurgeon

7 Moses took his tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of meeting. And it came to pass that everyone who sought the LORD went out to the tabernacle of meeting which was outside the camp.

- This was not the tabernacle of meeting that God instructed Moses to build because he wouldn't have had time as of yet, to build it.
- What's interesting about this is that "Moses took his tent and pitched it outside the camp, and far from the camp for a tent of meeting."
- Here's the question; "why would Moses not only pitch his tent outside the camp but far from the camp for the tabernacle of meeting?"

- Three thoughts; first, perhaps Moses may have not wanted to be in the camp, since God had removed His presence from the camp.
- A second thought is that Moses "blooms where he's planted," by pitching his own tent outside the camp as the tabernacle of meeting.
- Third; people now have to travel a distance to get to the tent of meeting, thus identifying who's really committed to worshiping the Lord.

8 So it was, whenever Moses went out to the tabernacle, that all the people rose, and each man stood at his tent door and watched Moses until he had gone into the tabernacle. 9 And it came to pass, when Moses entered the tabernacle, that the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the LORD talked with Moses. 10 All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the tabernacle door, and all the people rose and worshiped, each man in his tent door.

- Notice how the Israelites rise to their feet and stand at the entrance to their own tent and watch Moses until he enters the tabernacle.
- It's also interesting to note how the people see the pillar of cloud descend and when the Lord talks with Moses, the people worshipped.
- It's as if the people worshipped when Moses, leading by example worshipped, in the presence of the Lord as evidenced by the cloud.

11 So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle.

- Here again we have a potential difficulty because in verse 20 it says; "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live."
- So how is it that verse 11 says the Lord spoke to Moses face to face and verse 20 says no man can see His face and live?
- To help us better understand what's happening here, we can look at an account that took place in the book of Numbers chapter 12.

Numbers 12:1-8 1 Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. 2 "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the LORD heard this. 3 (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.) 4 At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you." So the three of them came out. 5 Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When both of them stepped forward, 6 he said, "Listen to my words: "When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, speak to him in dreams. 7 But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. 8 With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" NIV

- In other words, this doesn't mean that the Lord literally spoke face to face with Moses; rather it means the Lord spoke clearly to Moses.
- Instead of speaking in riddles, visions or dreams, the Lord revealed certain insights to him directly and with specific clarity.

"God will speak to Moses 'mouth to mouth', that is to say, not in dreams and visions, but clearly and directly. Moses had the gift of clarity of spiritual insight; he shared the very counsels of God."

R. Alan Cole, "Commentary on Exodus" p. 224

- Before we go to verse 12, there's something else here that can be easily missed. Did you notice how Joshua stayed in the tabernacle?
- One has suggested that this may be one of the reasons why Joshua was chosen to be Moses' successor to lead the Israelites.
- I believe that this is God preparing Joshua for that which He is preparing for Joshua, namely leading Israel into the Promised-Land.

12 Then Moses said to the LORD, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people.' But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight.' 13 Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people."

- Here Moses is praying in the presence of the Lord and asking him whom He will send with him now that he has led them out of Egypt.
- One commentator suggests that Moses isn't asking who the Lord is sending as his earthly successor but as their heavenly messenger.
- This seems to fit within the context of what is taking place at this point because God has removed His presence but not His promise.

- It's striking that Moses would pray to the Lord; "show me Your way." I believe this points to Jesus Who is "the way, truth and life."
- As an interesting side note; if it were an earthly successor and not the heavenly messenger that Moses prays for, then this is Joshua.
- What's interesting is that "Joshua," is "Yeshua," or "Jesus." So either way, this prayer by Moses is about the person of Jesus Christ.

14 And He said, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

- I think we have further insight into how this points to Jesus because God tells Moses; "My presence will go with you and give you rest."
- This reminds me of what Jesus said about coming to Him for rest for our "souls." This is a rest from the weariness of burdensome sin.

Matthew 11:28-30 28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." NIV

15 Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. 16 For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth."

- By the way; have you noticed that this prayer by Moses is a dialogue and not a monologue? There's a conversation that takes place.
- Moses is saying that if the Lord is not there, then he doesn't want to go there either, because God's grace is found in God's presence.
- In addition to this, Moses prays that they, as His people, should be separate, or distinct from all the other people in the world.

"Israel is always called to be distinct and different from other nations. Moses rightly sees that the chief distinctiveness of Israel lies here, in that God's presence is in her midst."

R. Alan Cole, "Commentary on Exodus" p. 224

17 So the LORD said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name."

- God responds to Moses with a loving kindness and grace with which He speaks to Him because of the relationship He has with him.
- Notice that God answers this prayer based on Moses' intercession and upon His relationship with Moses. This again points to Jesus.

Hebrews 7:25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. NIV

18 And he said, "Please, show me Your glory." 19 Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." 20 But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." 21 And the LORD said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock." 22 So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. 23 Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen."

- This is fascinating because when Moses asks God to show him His glory, He tells him he can only see His "afterglow" as it's called.
- Notice the link between God's goodness and His glory. He tells Moses that to show him His glory, His goodness will pass before him.
- In other words, to know the goodness of God is to know the glory of God because it glorifies God when we see the goodness of God.

- It's interesting to note what God doesn't say here, it's not; "I will be just to whom I will bring justice to," rather, it is; "I will be gracious."
- I believe this speaks of Jesus in Whom we see the glory and unspeakable goodness of God. This is what John's gospel says.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. NIV

- Even for Moses to just see the "afterglow" of God, he had to hide in the cleft of the rock. Again, this was God's mercy and protection.
- Perhaps you are familiar with the hymn of old: "Rock of Ages." It is from this passage that this hymn was born. Here are the words:

Rock of Ages

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee;
let the water and the blood,
from thy wounded side which flowed,
be of sin the double cure;
save from wrath and make me pure.

Not the labors of my hands
can fulfill thy law's commands;
could my zeal no respite know,
could my tears forever flow,
all for sin could not atone;
thou must save, and thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring,
simply to the cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress;
helpless, look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly;
wash me, Savior, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath,
when mine eyes shall close in death,
when I soar to worlds unknown,
see thee on thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee.